

Towards Strengthened Democratic Governance in the Southern Mediterranean

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INTERCONNECTING PEOPLE

Managing migration, avoiding populism, building inclusive societies and reinforcing North-South dialogue

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Concept note

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BACKGROUND

1. The political changes in Europe and other parts of the world in recent years have been quite startling in their suddenness and dimensions. These developments are only symptoms of much more deeply rooted changes, over which governments and international organisations seem to have little or no control. Forces are at work beyond anything we have previously had to deal with. Too much information is available, at great speed, from too many sources. Other tides which sweep us helplessly are the greenhouse effect and the changes in climate, the drive for ecological awareness, the vast movement of human beings fleeing from poverty and conflict, the rising economic inequalities and the intensity of terrorism without borders.

2. Council of Europe member states, some more than others, recently became the destination of an unexpected large migration flow. The dominant perception is that the migration flow follows mainly a South-North path, often forgetting the more relevant South-South movement, and that has had a negative and divisive impact. Such perception is not in line with the reality of the migration phenomenon and has been distorting the democratic debate about the meaning and the impact of the migratory flow in our societies. The understanding of the migration flow as a human and humanitarian problem, as it is most of the times marked by dramatic situations, simultaneously needs a triple approach in order to minimize its effects and safeguard longstanding and universal values that lie at the core of the Council of Europe, as well as of the EU and the UN. Is the migration an opportunity or a threat? We believe that it can be an opportunity if we manage to better regulate the migration flow in a way that is going to be positive to the destination countries, to the development of the origin countries and to the migrants themselves, who are looking to Europe as a safe and better place for the future of their families.

Managing migration must have a supranational, regional and national coordinated response and should address factors such as: scale, composition and intensity. Governments' policies towards the migrants; border and safety controls; modalities of integration and distribution of the migrants in the destination societies (where the diasporas and civil society can play a relevant role) are also important.

Empowering migrants by valuing their contribution to their countries of origin, especially through their remittances and the diasporas. Threats and risks, like trafficking, especially of women and unaccompanied minors, terrorism infiltration and welfare migration should also be taken into account when discussing this topic.

3. A number of reasons, some of them linked to the negative effects of globalization, like the erosion of organized labor, low-waged unskilled workers, the long-term unemployed, poorer white populations, shrinking welfare safety-nets, austerity policies, as well as the reaction against progressive cultural change and popular resentment towards traditional political classes, are feeding populist movements in Europe and elsewhere. Populist support is strengthened by anti-immigrant attitudes. Hostile or intolerant behaviors towards migrants, ethnic and racial minorities, commonly directed against refugees and asylum-seekers, especially towards Muslims, are also an important source of resentment. The newcomers speak different languages and have different religions and lifestyles from those of the native population, reinforcing the impression that traditional norms and values are rapidly disappearing. Populism, among other issues, emphasizes nationalistic and xenophobic appeals, rejects outsiders, ignites anti-immigrant and nativist sentiments, embraces isolationism and upholds stereotype gender roles.

Civil society has an important role to play in this context. But it is not enough. Traditional political parties should reinvent themselves and attract the new generations that have drifted away from politics. Raising awareness and advocacy is also part of the solution, but states and international organizations need also to understand that a new diverse international civism is emerging and aspires to “humanize” globalization.

4. This is why cultural diversity is not something that is going to go away tomorrow, compelling us to plan our strategies on the assumption of mutual understanding. People of different cultures share basic concepts but view them from different perspectives, leading them to behave in a manner which we may consider irrational or even in direct contradiction of what we hold sacred. We should nevertheless be optimistic about cultural diversity. Despite the deeply rooted attitudes and beliefs that will resist sudden transformation, a working knowledge of the basic traits of other cultures, as well as our own, will minimize culture shocks, give us insights in advance and enable us to successfully interact with nationalities, institutions, traditions and beliefs with which we apparently have some difficulties.

We will have to work shoulder to shoulder with them in the global village of the twenty-first century. We must understand them, speak to them, cooperate with them, and handle them. These are our cultural challenges. If one is able to see oneself or one’s culture from the outside and think more objectively as a consequence, one has a good chance of clearing away certain cultural barriers which would have impeded access to the thoughts or personalities of others. This leads to develop empathy with the other side, based on accepting differences and building on these in a constructive manner. The very act of adaptation, however, is fraught with difficulties. Core beliefs in other’s people lives are so well buttressed in their respective societies that we are well advised not to persist in challenging them, as changes can only come from within. For intercultural understanding we must learn to manage stereotypes, that is, to maximize and appreciate the positive values we perceive and minimize what we see as conflicting or negative. And we may enrich our own existence by absorbing certain features of other cultures. In doing so we are building inclusive societies.

5. The dialogue between the North and the South is of paramount importance for the Council of Europe, especially to its neighboring countries. We receive migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers from those countries, who are scourged by populist movements and traffickers, they enrich our culture with their traditions and they contribute to our own development as well as the economic growth of their countries of origin. So, all in all they should be considered as an opportunity. This dialogue must be demand-driven, should take into account local capacities and the real possibility of achieving concrete and sustainable goals. The role of the civil society and the bottom-up approach should be stressed here, as well as the other components of the Quadriologue (governments, parliaments and local and regional authorities). Enhancing political dialogue between the North and the South will allow the Council of Europe and our neighboring partners advancing bilateral, regional and multilateral issues of common interest.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

6. The 23rd edition of the Lisbon Forum is building upon the results and the operational recommendations of the last edition, which was dedicated to the following theme: “Migration and Human Rights: how to structure effective collective action”.

7. In addressing this time the theme “Interconnecting People: Managing migration, avoiding populism, building inclusive societies and reinforcing the North-South dialogue”, we are referring to the key priorities of the Council of Europe as presented in the latest Secretary General’s report on the State of

Democracy Human Rights and the Rule of Law and the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 agenda as guidelines to implement our work, we are looking at the role of the Quadriologue which should be strengthened in all its components and, perhaps most important, we are placing again at the center of our discussions and concerns the situation of the migrants and refugees in different perspectives. We would be able to demonstrate in four different panels how they can contribute to promote interdependence, create partnerships and foster solidarity between the North and the South.

8. Once more funded by the EU and carried out by the Council of Europe South Programme II - "towards strengthened democratic governance in the southern Mediterranean" -, this initiative aims at raising awareness and promoting advocacy in northern and southern societies on the theme, approaching them with a view to enhancing the dialogue, to reinforcing the need of interconnecting them, and hopefully to reaching a set of recommendations that can be useful for the stakeholders concerned.

TARGETED OUTCOMES

- Promote key priorities of the Council of Europe and the UN SDGs.
- Encourage member States of the Council of Europe to address migration as a manageable opportunity and not as a threat.
- Call the assistance of international, supranational, national and civil society institutions to work in a coordinated manner in order to uphold the rights of the migrants and refugees, as well as to integrate them in a human way in the countries of destination.
- Support the migrants in the process of the development of their countries of origin.
- Stimulate advocacy and raising awareness in the European and Southern populations in order to give them the necessary information to refuse populism and build a new universal civism around democracy, interdependence, partnership, solidarity and multiculturalism.
- Build inclusive societies, another soft power tool to make bridges between the North and the South, but also bearing in mind that differences should be respected within the universal values we share.
- Reinforce the cooperation between the North and the South through the existent instruments, by the Quadriologue institutions, and via different approaches in order to advance a common agenda.
- Contribute to interconnect people from the North and the South, getting them to better know each other thinking and perspectives over common issues.

TARGETED GROUPS FROM THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

- Representatives from the national governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities, civil society, diasporas, migrants and refugees.
- Representatives from CoE, UN, EU and other international organizations.
- Politicians and Mayors
- Opinion makers and journalists.
- Foundations and Academia.